

Origin Story from Greece

Introduction

Greece is a country on the Mediterranean Sea. Its mainland is a *peninsula*, which is land bordered by water on three sides. The rest of the country is made up of small islands. The peak of ancient Greek culture occurred in the fifth century B.C.E. and was called the “Golden Age.” During this time, advancements were made in the areas of government, architecture, mathematics, and philosophy. This origin story was written by the Greek poet Hesiod, who lived in the eighth century B.C.E.

Origin Story

A great war between the Gods had ended, and the world was at last a safe place to live. The Gods decided it was time to create new forms of life.

They went to Zeus (pronounced ZOOS), the king of the Gods. Cautiously, the Gods approached the powerful bearded figure who sat upon a golden throne. They asked him to create new life on earth.

Zeus brushed his curly hair back from his forehead, stroked his thick beard, and sneered. “This job of creating lowly creatures is beneath me. Let the two giant Titans (pronounced TIE-tens), Prometheus (pronounced pro-ME-thee-us), and Epimetheus (pronounced epi-ME-thee-us), perform this lowly task.”

The choice of Prometheus was a good one, for he was extremely wise. His name meant “forethought,” which indicated his wisdom.

His brother Epimetheus, however, often acted too quickly and later regretted his actions. His name meant “afterthought,” which indicated his haste.

The two Titans were brought before Zeus. They were tall as mountains and towered above him, but they fearfully waited for Zeus to speak.

“The Gods have decided that it is time to create new creatures on earth. Epimetheus, you will create the humans and animals. Prometheus, you will add any details that are needed. If you work together, perhaps there will be no mistakes!” Zeus arrogantly declared. He then abruptly dismissed them.

As they left Zeus’s palace, Prometheus asked, “How shall we begin?”

“I’d like to make animals and the other lowly creatures first,” Epimetheus answered quickly. He began his work immediately, rapidly molding various living creatures from clay. When he was done, he stepped back and examined his creations.

“I think each of you needs some special gifts in order to survive,” he told his creations. He granted the best gifts to his first creations: strength, courage, speed, and cleverness.

“I have given the animals all of the qualities which will need to survive,” Epimetheus said. “Now I guess I should begin creating humans.”

But suddenly a terrible realization struck him. “Oh, no!” he cried. “I have given away all of the special gifts that humans will need for survival! There is nothing left! What can I do?”

Epimetheus rushed to his brother, Prometheus. Sorrowfully he confessed that, once again, he had acted too quickly.

“Epimetheus, you have not thought ahead,” Prometheus said wearily. “How could you have been so foolish? Go to your workshop and make a mold of a human. Then bring it to me.”

A short time later, Epimetheus returned with the cast of a human.

“I made this in the image of the Gods. Isn’t it handsome?” Epimetheus proudly handed the mold to Prometheus, who filled it with a mixture of earth and water. Turning to his brother, Prometheus said, “There is only one gift you have not given away that will help humans survive. It is fire. With fire, they can keep themselves warm. They can cook their food and drive away the darkness at night. Fire will allow them to create tools.”

“But Zeus has forbidden anyone from taking fire from heaven!” Epimetheus protested. “If Zeus discovers that you have taken it, the punishment will be terrible!”

But Prometheus ignored his brother’s pleas and gave humans fire.

When Zeus looked down upon earth from the heavens and saw people’s blazing campfires, he was furious. “Prometheus will pay for what he has done!” he thundered.

But it was too late to take back the gift: humans became superior to all other living creatures on earth.



- **Why were Prometheus and Epimetheus chosen to make humans?**
- **What mistake did Epimetheus make when he created animals?**
- **How were humans created?**
- **What gift did Prometheus give to humans, and why was this gift valuable?**